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SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/18/2015
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [TI](#)
SUBJECT: TAJIKISTAN'S NGOS TIRED OF CORRUPTION AND VISA DELAYS, BUT
SOLDIER ON

REF: A) DUSHANBE 1766 B) DUSHANBE 1806

CLASSIFIED BY: Richard Hoagland, Ambassador, State, State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) SUMMARY: At the monthly NGO Forum meeting, the only surprise was that a handful of NGOS had not experienced visa problems or been forced to pay bribes for airline tickets or continuous electricity. The November 17 meeting underscored the Dushanbe development community's increased frustration and confusion over visa and registration problems, as well as the hidden "fees" for getting things done in Tajikistan. All but one NGO declined to respond to the MFA's recent request for information about local staff. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (SBU) No particular pattern has emerged to pinpoint whether the growing visa delays and complications are due to a policy shift, or simple bureaucratic ineptitude (reftel a). Of the 25 Forum attendees, many complained that despite the MFA Consular Section's stated policy of 15 days to issue a Letter of Invitation or renew a visa, in practice most visas are taking close to a month. In some cases, Italian, French and American NGO staff worked without valid visas for several weeks.

[1](#)3. (C) International organizations (including the U.S. Embassy) are frequently resorting to high-level government intervention on routine visa issuances. The Italian NGO CEVSI had two refusals overturned only after a deputy foreign minister got involved. The EU representative told an anecdote about a consultant not getting a visa until the Foreign Minister himself inquired of the consular section. "If we had known this was important to you, we would have issued it right away," was the response.

[1](#)4. (C) Aga Khan Foundation reported many of its Pakistani visitors were denied visas, particularly if they identified themselves as Ismaili scholars. Save the Children noted similar problems for its Pakistani, Bangladeshi and Afghan staff.

[1](#)5. (C) Corruption chafed more than usual, as several NGOs expressed frustration at additional "fees" for purchasing airline tickets. The head of CEVSI noted

that without 10% on top, she was told she would not get a seat on any flight. "Rudaki is a toll road," quipped Mercy Corps Director Gary Burniske, referring to the capital's main artery. Traffic police positioned every few hundred meters frequently wave cars to the side of the road, but for a few somoni (\$1-2), most drivers continue. About half the participants admitted they paid extra each month to ensure that basic utilities-phone, gas, water, electrical-continued uninterrupted.

16. (C) With the exception of German Agro Action, all NGOs present had refused to provide the MFA with information about their local staff (reftel b). Several noted their lawyers had advised that the MFA had no legal basis to request the names, addresses and passport numbers of Tajik citizens employed by their organization. Burniske related that Mercy Corps had received the same request three years running, and had never replied.

17. (SBU) COMMENT: The NGOS, while concerned about the tightening work conditions in Tajikistan, showed no signs of pulling up their tent pegs or even altering their activities. They welcomed a U.S.-proposed roundtable with donors and government officials, planned for late November, to clarify visa and registration procedures. Meanwhile, the verdict is still out as to why there have been so many visa delays. END COMMENT
HOAGLAND

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